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“Don Baltazar on Horseback”
by Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez
In the Prado Museum, Madrid
Copy by the late Carroll Beckwith

THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

FOURTH YEAR

NOVEMBER 1917

NUMBER EIGHT

THE VALUE OF CARROLL BECKWITH'S COPIES

BY EDWIN HOWLAND BLASHFIELD

"Will you please convey to the authorities of your Museum my desire to have exhibited in your city my collection of *copies* which I have made during the past 40 years as part of my art training? They are now gathered together, 32 in number, and are on exhibition at the City Museum of St. Louis. If you write to Mr. Holland, the Director, he will tell you about them and send you the catalogue. I wish them shown as widely as possible, as I believe they have great educational value among our people, only a very small fraction of whom will ever be able to see the originals. They are from the galleries of Paris, Vienna, Madrid, Haarlem, Florence and Dresden. Twenty framed photographs go with them; these I wish to have hung with the copies to incite our intelligent observers to study and compare. You would have to assume the expense of transportation and insurance. This idea was suggested to me by Miss Sage, Director of the Buffalo Art Museum, who first exhibited them in 1910 and published a very exhaustive catalogue of the collection as it existed then, which no doubt she would send you if you write for it."

The above is a memorandum found among Carroll Beckwith's papers after his decease.

A tragic interest is added to the very real intrinsic interest of his collection of copies by the fact that the question of its exhibition in Cleveland was probably the very last one which occupied the mind of the artist. He had been discussing with Mrs. Beckwith a possible visit to Cleveland and a talk before an audience when he left her, late in the afternoon, to take a short walk. He returned in a motor-cab, evidently ill, and died immediately after entering the door of the hotel (The Schuyler) of which he had been an inmate for more than a year.

To repeat: the intrinsic value of this collection is great; its relative interest is perhaps even greater; relative, that is to say, as to art education and to the situation which governs our acquaintance with the masterpieces of the artists of the past. This situation is peculiar: appreciation of the so-called old masters has so increased in the last twenty-five years that fortunes are paid for single canvases. Wonderful pictures come to America, but the originals of *these* particular pictures, which Carroll Beckwith has so coveted as an influence for instruction, are firmly anchored in galleries which are the property not of individuals but of nations.

They will not come to America, even in this age of war indemnities, and those who would see them must journey to them or see them as

copies. Hence the special value of the latter to the non-traveling public, while to those with eyes to see, the instructive value of any good copies is indisputable. We should be grateful to Carroll Beckwith for his wisdom in selecting his youthful enthusiasm—since he began this series long ago—which prompted him to give up time from his school studies to patiently copying the great work of the fore-runners.

The usefulness of a good museum of copies, both as a stimulant and a corrective, has been recognized by the nation which stands at the head of modern art. The Ecole des Beaux-Arts, in Paris, demands of its pupils full-size copies of oil paintings, panels and frescoes of the Old Masters. Our American Academy in Rome leans not a little, in its sympathies, towards a like policy, and it may be that some time we shall have a museum of copies of our own. If so, we shall look back upon Beckwith and Chase and others as pioneers.

If so much may be said for the relative value of the canvases in this exhibition, a sharp distinction in intrinsic quality may be made between the work of the professional copyist who reproduces the famous galleries' "best sellers" *ad infinitum*, and the work of the enthusiast who copies for his own instruction and instinctively gravitates towards what he can best copy because it is what he likes and understands best.

Mr. Beckwith's were copies made for love and without *arrière-pensee*, and cover a period of forty years. It is interesting to note that throughout these four decades he never varied his station, his point of view, which is assumed at the moment of the highest maturity, when the early seventeenth century was adding to the achievement of the full Renaissance the further achievements of manipulation of pigment—in artists' parlance, of "handling."

When Beckwith went to Paris in the seventies, new gods were upon Parnassus and were adored with the acclaim so readily given to the new. Frans Hals was worshipful to the Carolus-men of the Rive Gauche, Ribera to the Bonnat-men of the Rive Droite. But Velasquez was the great god in both camps, and it was only natural that Carroll Beckwith should give hours, which he has since often called very happy ones, to the great master of the Prado.

Just as natural it was that Haarlem should call him later to that long room where Frans Hals has immortalized his scores of Dutchmen, as eternal banqueters. Cassel and Dresden again are galleries where the seventeenth century is to the fore. Cassel especially, for there are few European collections of a high order where the primitives of all nations are so excluded, and the collector has so limited himself to a circle in which Rubens and Rembrandt, Hals and Jordaens are the leading spirits. "The last of the great masters,"

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, is almost the latest in date of the series of copies, although Largilliere and Nattier were his contemporaries, while with Tintoretto at the other end of the list we have Italians and Venetians both at the beginning and the end of our copyist's selection. Draughtsmanship, construction and handling were peculiarly sympathetic to Carroll Beckwith, and in that sympathy we find the secret of his choice of subjects for reproduction.

It is to be hoped that these copies will be seen in many cities, not only in great centres, but, and we believe with even more potential advantage, in smaller cities where the travelers do not constitute so large a proportion of the public. For it is very unusual that so many copies should be grouped together in what is indeed perhaps a unique collection in America.

The enthusiasm which impelled Carroll Beckwith, at a time when, as a studio comrade of Sargent, or later as a companion of Chase, he lingered long in Madrid and learned to know its streets and bull-ring as well as its galleries, did not desert him in later life.

In Genoa and Venice as well as in Holland and Germany he was always ready to turn aside for a time from his other work and testify to his respect and admiration for the Old Masters. There should be fruit for young students in the study of these copies, as well as reminders for those who love the originals.

EXHIBITION OF COPIES OF OLD MASTERS AND OTHER WORKS BY J. CARROLL BECKWITH

On October twenty-fourth, after some correspondence, a telegram was received from Mr. Beckwith saying he had ordered his collection of copies of Old Masters forwarded to the Museum. Early the next morning came another telegram, from Mr. Blashfield, announcing Carroll Beckwith's death and Mrs. Beckwith's request that plans for the exhibit be completed. The afternoon mail brought a letter from Mr. Beckwith written evidently just before he went out for the last walk he was ever to take. The following extracts from this, probably his last letter, are of interest:

"I hope they may arrive in good order and that you will carefully examine the condition of the frames when they reach you and also the exact number of the photographs from the originals . . . These photographs are very precious to me, as I have had great difficulty in gathering them, and I consider them *extremely instructive* when hung in *close proximity* to the particular copy, thereby encouraging the student or amateur to make comparisons and become intimate with the masterpiece. I would like very much to come out



Cartoon by Louis Raemaekers
"In Humanity's Service"